

LOWDOWN TRACKS



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LOWDOWN TRACKS

Directed by Shelley Saywell

2015 | Canada | 86 min

TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of *Lowdown Tracks* by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their class, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some weblinks that provide starting points for further research or discussion.

The Film

Their songs are melodies for the masses, filling subway platforms and street corners, yet the singers remain unknown. Some are homeless, others "home free." Their personal histories vary as much as their voices, but their music unifies their point of view from the margins of society. Inspired by depression-era recordings of early American folk songs, filmmaker Shelley Saywell and singer and activist Lorraine Segato of The Parachute Club set out to document a new catalogue of songs and stories from five of Toronto's modern troubadours. Their lyrics are honest, heartfelt and passionate, but their freedom to perform is threatened by the city's bureaucratic busker system. Shining a light on the struggles they face—be it in shelters, with social programs, with their addictions and abuse—a soundtrack evolves from the island ferry docks and freeway underpasses, rooming houses and rooftops, showing us that music is the common language in this empowering celebration of survival. Alexander Rogalski

Source: <http://www.hotdocs.ca>

The Filmmaker

Shelley Saywell is a producer, director and writer of documentary films. Her films have won numerous international awards including an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Journalism and been short-listed for the Academy Awards. They have been broadcast in more than 30 countries, and invited as official selections to numerous international film festivals. In 2003 Saywell was in the spotlight as Director in Focus at Toronto's Hot Docs Film Festival. She has been honoured with UNESCO's Gandhi Silver Medal for promoting the culture of peace. Saywell's most recent film *In the Name of the Family* is a feature-length documentary, has screened at many international festivals, garnered a Genie Nomination and won Best Canadian Documentary at Hot Docs 2010. In 2010 Saywell was honoured with the Creative Excellence Award by Women in Film and Television—Toronto. Saywell is author of *Women in War* (Penguin Books, 1986) and contributing author to *Ourselves Among Others* (St. Martins Press, 1988).

Source: <http://bisharifilms.com/>

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VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

The following three subsections are intended to provide you with a range of Pre-Viewing, Viewing and Post-Viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes and a page of weblinks for further investigation.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Show students the trailer for *Lowdown Tracks* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-BdKteAHWI>). Have students work in pairs or small groups to try to identify themes or ideas conveyed by the trailer. As a larger group, discuss with students how effective/affective the trailer is as a media piece, and what the title of the movie could represent.

Ask students for their perceptions of homelessness in their own community. As an extension, students may wish to conduct additional research for a deeper understanding.

Print several of the questions or quotations from the Extensions Activities section of this guide on individual sheets of paper. Have students work in small groups or with partners to discuss if they agree with the ideas.

Have students define some or all of the following terms: (a) busker, (b) folk music, (c) homeless, (d) poverty, (e) mental illness, (f) PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), (g) shelter, (h) social activist and (i) the Great Depression. In three columns, have students write the word(s), the definition, and how the word would be used in a sentence. Discuss as a class.

Viewing Activities

Have students complete the PBS viewing guide on documentaries (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/docs/Copies%20of%20Viewing%20Guide.pdf>). Students can revisit their completed documents as a Post-Viewing Activity.

Have students jot down three to five ideas for discussion, or questions that the film raises in their minds. As an Extension and/or Post-Viewing Activity, students can enter their questions into an online response or polling system and can vote on the questions or issues they would like to explore in further detail. Encourage students to use multiple levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Have students make notes on one or more of the following individuals from the film: Katt Budd, Bruce Bathgate, Wendell (Woody) Cormier and Maryanne Epp. What challenges have these individuals faced throughout their lives and what are their perceptions of homelessness?

Have students make notes on the different types of footage and techniques that are used throughout the documentary. Students can consider the purpose and effectiveness of interview footage, voiceover and music in their notes.

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss with students their initial reactions to the film, the featured musicians and homelessness. Did their feelings evolve over the course of the film?

What were students' initial perceptions of homelessness in their communities? Using this as a prompt, have students write a two-paragraph response.

Have students participate in a Socratic discussion on the film. Guidelines for Socratic discussions can be found here: <http://www.authenticeducation.org/documents/WhatSeminar04.pdf>

Show the students their quotations from the Pre-Viewing Activity and see if their opinions were changed, altered or enhanced by the film.

In the film, Lorraine Segato discusses Alan Lomax and his father, John, who "recorded folk music across America. Those famous recordings came to symbolize a people and a time. In a way, they became an inspiration for this film." Have students research the Lomax family and their contributions to folk music (<http://www.loc.gov/> Type "Lomax family" into the search function of the website).

Have students read about the historical background of folk music (http://www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs_arm_itc_historical_background.html). How does this type of music reflect history and cultural identity?

Have students choose one of the events or stories from the film and write a diary entry as if they were part of the event.

Have students research the homelessness services that are available in their local community. What services are available? Could these services be improved?

Have students examine how homelessness is portrayed and perceived in the local, national and/or international media. Are there connections between current events and homelessness? Students can share their results in small groups or as a class.

Have students discuss post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as it appears in the film. Based on examples from the film, what are some of the long-term effects of PTSD? Who does PTSD affect? As an extension, you may wish to have students research PTSD as it pertains to sexual assault.

As a class, view videos from Bell's Let's Talk campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo0H4jLotmp4c-y0cIfb-N6-RGQ9Jod68>). Next, brainstorm ways that schools and families can promote positive mental health. You can also have students consider and evaluate initiatives that are already in place in your school and community.

Have students complete an exit note. The exit note should contain one idea that demonstrates what they learned from the film, as well as one question that they still have about the topic.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

About the Film

<http://www.lowdowntracks.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/LowdownTracks>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lowdowntracks>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkqccMIPMJw_pjtuG4wypg

Additional Resources

20,000 Homes: Powered by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the 20,000 Homes campaign has a goal to permanently house 20,000 homeless Canadians by 2018. Track the progress and join the movement.
<http://www.20khomes.ca>

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness: The CAEH has a vision to end homelessness in Canada by raising awareness, providing resources, and helping communities to develop and implement their own plans.
<http://www.caeh.ca>

Canadian Mental Health Association: The CMHA promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness through advocacy, education, research and service.
<http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health>

Google Music Timeline: Google's Music Timeline maps the course of modern music. Students can explore the evolution of specific genres, including folk music, based on Google Play analytics. Please use Google Chrome when visiting the timeline.
<https://research.google.com/bigpicture/music/#>

Homeless Hub: The Homeless Hub's goal is to provide accessible resources, research and solutions to homelessness.
<http://homelesshub.ca>

Huffington Post: The article "Canada Could End Homelessness. And It'll Only Cost You \$46 a Year" from August 13, 2015, examines the current state of homelessness in Canada, as well as successful Housing First initiatives that have been implemented across North America.
http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/08/13/housing-first-federal-election_n_7949510.html

NPR: "Tide Starts to Turn Against the 'Crime' of Being Homeless" (four minutes of audio published on November 3,

2015). With federal support, many communities in the United States have stopped treating homelessness as a crime and are now focusing on finding places for homeless individuals to live.
<http://www.npr.org/> Type the title of the report into the search function of the website.

TED Talks: In "Between Music and Medicine," Robert Gupta discusses the therapeutic benefits of music on the brain, and how music can help marginalized individuals in society, including the homeless and those with mental illness.
<http://www.ted.com/> Type "Robert Gupta" into the search function of the website.

The City of Toronto: The homepage for homelessness services in Toronto includes featured services, a daily shelter census and shelter standards.
<http://www.toronto.ca/> On the homepage, go to Living in Toronto, then Housing, then Housing and Homelessness Services.

The Homeless Hub: The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 is a report by the Homeless Hub and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. The report examines the current state of homelessness in Canada, as well as the historical, social and economic contexts of homelessness, demographic features of the issue and potential solutions.
<http://homelesshub.ca/> Type the name of the report into the search function of the website.

The New Yorker: "The Other Millennials" follows several homeless millennials in New York and uncovers the reasons for their homelessness. This video is six minutes long.
<http://www.newyorker.com/> Type the title of the video into the search function of the website.

Various Links for Lesson Plan Ideas, Media Awareness, Critical Literacy and Documentary Films

Center for Media Literacy: A US website which provides resources for making, understanding and criticizing media.
<http://www.medialit.org>

Media Awareness: A Canadian non-profit media education and Internet literacy resource library.
<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

NFB: Valuable education resources for the classroom.
<http://www.nfb.ca>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

The film opens with Lorraine and Bruce discussing the impossibility of getting into the shelters in the brutal winter weather. Later on in the film, Katt Budd says, "I don't know where they expect them to go. There's no room in the shelters, you can't stay under bridges, you can't sleep in the park, you can't sleep in the sidewalk, you can't sleep in a door." How are shelters portrayed in the film? What are other options for the homeless?

What are the different issues and themes that surface in this film? How do these issues and themes surface in the songs of the individuals in the film?

Why do the individuals in the film create music?

How can someone's life experiences come through in their music? Find examples of this in the film and in the music that you listen to.

Why does Lorraine Segato appear so frequently in the film? What is the purpose of this, and is it effective? Compare and contrast this with the appearances of filmmaker Shelley Saywell.

Lorraine Segato is a musician who has discussed her own fear of homelessness before (<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/dnto/> Type "Lorraine Segato's fear of homelessness" into the search function of the website to listen to the interview with Sook-Yin Lee). How does this affect and influence the documentary? How would this film have been different if Segato had not gone through similar experiences to the individuals in the film? Explain.

In the film, Lorraine Segato says, "As a singer and social activist, I've always linked music to the causes I've cared about, and our homeless crisis deeply troubles me." Where else have you seen music connected with social activism, and how effective is music when it is used as a vessel for social activism?

Katt Budd mentions that "people with PTSD use music as an escape from real life." How is music used as an escape for the individuals in the film? Did you see any connections between their lyrics and their traumatic experiences or challenges?

In the film, Maryanne Epp comments on the state of homelessness in Canada: "It makes me feel like this is a Third World country. This is Canada. We're better than this."

Have students reflect on her statement and then discuss ways that they can contribute to and affect change for the homeless in Canada, individually and in their local communities.

The film's subjects have varied levels of support from their families and communities. How does your family support you, and what other support(s) do you have access to?

What challenges do the film's subjects face on a daily basis, and what challenges are faced by the homeless community in general?

As Lorraine Segato began her project, she says, "I started to see a whole world of transient musicians—homeless or drifting, by choice or by circumstance." As a class, define "transient." Discuss the following question: What are the choices and/or circumstances that lead to the musicians in the film being transient and/or homeless?

How does the film deal with issues of freedom, equality, human dignity and individual and collective rights and responsibilities?

What are the small ways that an individual can cause change to happen?

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM TO EXPLORE

1. *"This woman walks by because we're sitting on the sidewalk with our dogs. She goes, 'Are you people homeless?' And we're like, 'We're home free!'"*
Railyard Ghosts
2. *"We see the cracks. We see the ghosts. We see the shadows. And we're the people that everybody walks by every day. And that people tell to get a job. They don't make space for people who can't be a cog in the 9 to 5."* Railyard Ghosts
3. *"Music is the core element that, in so many ways, makes it possible for people to survive the most difficult of times."* Lorraine Segato
4. *"Seven years, 23 different shelters, three different provinces—it's been a really hard journey."*
Maryanne Epp
5. *"Some people do use that term—panhandling—because they've never heard of the term 'busker.'"*
Bruce Bathgate
6. *"I'm a wanderer and I'm homeless. Having a room doesn't give me a home. It just means I give somebody money. I get to live in a room for a while."*
Wendell Cormier
7. *"It's getting to be a rich man's world. The poor man has no place in society anymore. We're being shut out."* Bruce Bathgate
8. *"I didn't trust that my community could help me. No relative, no friend. Not even the social services that were there."* Maryanne Epp
9. *"My story matters."* Maryanne Epp
10. *"I don't know where they expect them to go. There's no room in the shelters, you can't stay under bridges, you can't sleep in the park, you can't sleep in the sidewalk, you can't sleep in a door."* Katt Budd
11. *"Society is so rich but has failed so many."*
Lorraine Segato

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS

In October 2015, Ontario joined several other provinces in a bid to end homelessness. First, have students read the October 29, 2015, article, "Ontario Sets 10-Year Deadline to End Homelessness" (<http://www.thestar.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website). Encourage students to explore the hyperlinks throughout the article, independently or in pairs. The links will lead them to additional information on the topic, including related articles as well as the official report from the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, *A Place to Call Home*.

Using a free website creation tool such as Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com>), have students brainstorm and create websites that define the issue(s) and consider new prevention and response strategies to homelessness in their local or provincial communities.

Websites should include the following:

- A definition of homelessness
- General facts outlining the issue(s) in the film
- The individuals or groups involved in the conflict
- Impacts on individuals, communities and organizations
- Statistics
- Potential short- and long-term solutions, addressing potential prevention and response strategies to homelessness
- Photos and other multimedia
- Links to additional information or relevant social media
- Hyperlinked sources should be on their own page in APA format

Students should be encouraged to create more than one page on their website. They should properly reference any text or multimedia that is not their own.

ACTIVITY RUBRIC: PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS

Knowledge and Understanding

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Understanding of the issues, overall impacts, and potential preventions/solutions	Student demonstrates a limited understanding of the issues, overall impacts and potential preventions/solutions	Student demonstrates a moderate understanding of the issues, overall impacts and potential preventions/solutions	Student demonstrates a considerable understanding of the issues, overall impacts and potential preventions/solutions	Student demonstrates a high level of understanding of the issues, overall impacts and potential preventions/solutions	/5

Thinking and Inquiry

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Ability to research, synthesize and organize additional resources	Student demonstrates a limited ability to research, synthesize and organize additional resources	Student demonstrates a moderate ability to research, synthesize and organize additional resources	Student demonstrates a considerable ability to research, synthesize and organize additional resources	Student demonstrates an outstanding ability to research, synthesize and organize additional resources	/5

Application

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Sources included in bibliography	Student has an insufficient amount of sources and is missing most APA formatting	Student provides resources but APA formatting needs work	Student uses more than two sources and uses APA formatting	Student uses more than three sources; a variety of sources are included in proper APA formatting	/5

Communication

	2.5 2.9	3.0 3.4	3.5 3.9	4.0 5	
Layout and organization of ideas/multimedia	The layout is not well organized and could be neater; the website contains numerous grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The layout is somewhat professional but needs more details and creativity; the website contains some grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The layout is somewhat professional; the website is largely free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	The layout is professional, very impressive and creative; the website is free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors	/5

Comments:

Total: _____/20 = _____/10

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

COURSE	OVERALL EXPECTATIONS
Grade 7 & 8 Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience. • draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience. • use editing, proofreading and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression and present their work effectively. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.
Grades 9–12 English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience. • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.
Grade 11 Media Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts. • deconstruct a variety of types of media texts, identifying the codes, conventions and techniques used and explaining how they create meaning.
Grade 11 Media Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze, through examination and reflection, their initial response to media art works, using various strategies and modes of communication. • identify and explain the messages in and meanings of media texts. • describe the characteristics of particular media genres and forms, and explain how they help to convey meaning and influence the audience.
Grade 9 & 10 Integrated Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate an understanding of the ability of the arts to inform and instruct and to contribute to social change.
Grade 11 & 12 Exploring and Creating in the Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze, on the basis of research, the impact of a range of factors on the development of artists from various arts disciplines.
Grade 9–12 Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct research to gather reliable information relating to specific music, musicians and the musical opinions of others, and describe the impact this information has had on their own opinions or assessments. • identify and describe ways in which commercial music reflects the society in which it was created and how it has affected communities or cultures. • demonstrate an understanding of how traditional, commercial, and art music reflect the society in which they were created and how they have affected communities or cultures.
Grade 9 Healthy Active Living Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify warning signs and symptoms that could be related to mental health concerns and describe a variety of strategies for coping with or responding to mental health concerns affecting oneself or others. • describe skills and strategies that can be used to prevent or respond to situations of verbal, physical and social bullying and sexual harassment.
Grade 10 Healthy Active Living Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of factors that enhance mental health and emotional and spiritual well-being.
Grade 11 Healthy Active Living Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of a variety of mental illnesses and addictions, their causes and manifestations, and their effects on personal health and well-being. • describe factors that contribute to the stigmatization of mental illness and identify strategies that could be used to reduce stigma in their local community.

Grade 11 Health for Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and describe school and community services that offer support related to health and wellness.
Grade 11 Dynamics of Human Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore a variety of topics related to healthy relationships to identify topics for research and inquiry. • explain the interrelationship between self-concept, self-esteem and mental health. • identify and consult a variety of credible resources for information and assistance in making decisions.
Grade 11 Housing and Home Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between housing and various human needs and wants. • explain what happens to people when their housing needs are not met, and demonstrate an understanding of laws and policies related to housing standards in Canada. • demonstrate an understanding of how stages of the life cycle can affect people's choice of and modifications to living spaces. • demonstrate an understanding of the impact that social factors, including cultural traditions, can have on housing. • demonstrate an understanding of different types of housing, including housing for specialized markets, and of housing-related support programs.
Grade 11 Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze patterns and trends related to employment and unemployment in Canada, their causes, and their impact on individuals and society. • analyze causes and measures of, as well as responses to, economic inequality in Canada.
Grade 12 Analyzing Current Economic Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain programs and policies of governments in various countries designed to narrow income inequality and assess their effectiveness. • analyze data on global economic disparities and explain the main causes and effects of economic marginalization. • assess the impacts of increased urbanization on the environment and society. • explain the role of law in responding to various contemporary social issues.
Grade 11 Politics in Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues of political importance in various communities and ways to address them. • explain the political importance of some current issues and analyze various perspectives associated with these issues. • analyze some issues of political importance in terms of their causes, their impact and ways in which they have been addressed.
Grade 12 Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events and developments of national and international political importance.
Grade 11 Family Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the role parents play in affecting how children form relationships within and outside the family. • identify and describe environments provided by families, care-givers and others that offer positive conditions for child development.
Grade 12 Family Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze theories and research on the subject of individual development, and summarize their findings. • analyze theories and research on the subject of parent-child relationships and their role in individual and family development, and summarize their findings. • demonstrate an understanding of the critical role that a family plays in the socialization of its members. • analyze the many relationships that are a part of human development.
Grade 11 Gender Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyze the impact of gender-based violence. • explain how social institutions or systems (e.g., criminal justice, legal, social service, immigration and international development systems) can perpetuate or decrease homophobic and gender-based violence and harassment in both Canadian and global contexts. • demonstrate an understanding of a range of awareness and prevention strategies relating to forms of gender-based violence, including sexual assault and gender-based bullying and harassment.

Grade 11 Equity, Diversity and Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore topics related to equity, diversity and/or social justice, and formulate questions to guide their research. • create research plans, and locate and select information relevant to their chosen topics, using appropriate social science research and inquiry methods. • assess, record, analyze and synthesize information gathered through research and inquiry. • communicate the results of their research and inquiry clearly and effectively, and reflect on and evaluate their research, inquiry and communication skills. • demonstrate an understanding of the impact individual action can have on equity, social justice and environmental issues, and of how the media can create awareness of these issues. • demonstrate an understanding of a range of historical and contemporary Canadian equity and social justice issues. • demonstrate an understanding of how social activism can be used to support equity and social justice objectives.
Grade 12 Equity and Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore topics related to equity, diversity and/or social justice, and formulate questions to guide their research. • create research plans, and locate and select information relevant to their chosen topics, using appropriate social science research and inquiry methods. • assess, record, analyze and synthesize information gathered through research and inquiry. • communicate the results of their research and inquiry clearly and effectively, and reflect on and evaluate their research, inquiry and communication skills. • demonstrate an understanding of a range of perspectives on and approaches to equity and social justice issues, and of factors that affect inequity and social injustice. • analyze, in historical and contemporary contexts, the dynamics of power relations and privilege as well as various factors that contribute to power or marginalization. • evaluate the contributions of individuals and groups and/or movements identified with specific aspects of the struggle for equity and social justice. • compare policies, strategies and initiatives used by various groups, including indigenous peoples and women, to address equity and social justice issues in a variety of jurisdictions.
Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore topics related to anthropology, psychology and sociology, and formulate questions appropriate to each discipline to guide their research. • use a psychological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape human mental processes and behaviour. • use a sociological perspective to explain how diverse factors influence and shape individual and group social behaviour.

The Overall Expectations listed above are from *the Ontario Curriculum*. Complete course descriptions, including all Overall and Specific Expectations, can be found at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html>